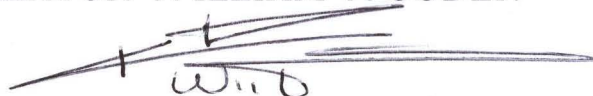


VIBRATIONS: A DOCUMENTARY

AN HONORS THESIS (HONRS 499)

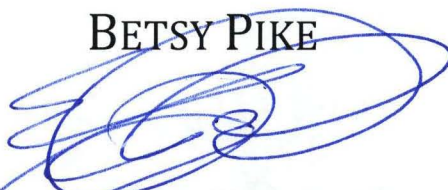
BY

KEATON WILLIAM WOODEN

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K.W. Wooden', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

THESIS ADVISOR

BETSY PIKE

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke.

BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

MUNCIE, INDIANA

MAY 2010

Expected Date of Graduation
May 2010

ABSTRACT

I began by researching the Deaf community and wanting to create a music video for the Deaf. I later came up to make a promotional video for a performing arts troupe called Vibrations. I then wrote a grant for WIPB and was awarded \$8,000 on the condition that I make a documentary to be premiered on PBS. Starting in September of 2009, I gathered a group of nearly 30 people and we made a completed documentary following the inspiring story of the children at the Indiana School for the Deaf and the work they put into their school year.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without these people I would not have been able to create this documentary. Either in spirit or in physical work, I owe an undying gratitude to the following people:

Debbie Fetzer- Debbie is the founder of Vibrations and works as the professional developments coordinator at the Indiana School for the Deaf. She allowed the documentary crew to visit and interview the kids throughout the semester. She also was an invaluable resource for anthropological research.

Andy Rork- Andy is a professional interpreter at the Indiana School for the Deaf. Andy provided all interpretation for the documentary crew and gave invaluable information regarding the Deaf community and how our crew could better interact with the.

Elizabeth Pike- Professor Pike is my thesis advisor from the Telecommunications Department. She gave developmental advice and helped me solve several problems that developed through the project. She was both a morale and storytelling ally.

Dr Michael O'hara- Dr O'hara was a great support in the making of the promotional video. His counsel was particularly important in listening to Debbie and following through on the promotional video.

Paul Symons- Paul was my second Producer on the project. He gave incredible support in the development and production work. He helped plan the documentary as well as negotiate the careful boundary that exists between the Deaf and hearing communities.

Kenny Brown- Kenny was the associate producer on the project. He helped in the story development and, more importantly, the enthusiasm that we needed to keep the project running

Vibrations Kids- these kids were the heart and soul, literally, of the documentary. Without their belief in themselves and their work ethic, we could not have told any story at all, or learned so much. Thanks to Keren, Brandi, Daniel, Sean, Paige, Giovanni, Jenna, Katie, Demi, Simone, Tyler, and Matthew.

Natalie Cooper- Natalie was my Assistant Director for the promotional video. She was an incredible organizational support as well as a leader on the set. She should be commended for her work.

Sean Forbes- Sean is a Deaf performing artist from Michigan and founder of D-PAN.com. He was a great resource for the Vibrations kids and was an enthusiastic guest artist.

VIBRATIONS: A DOCUMENTARY

I began working on this project initially with a desire to make a Deaf music video. The desire came from Ethan Jackson, who informed me about the failure of the mainstream music industry to include Deaf performing artists in their work that included sign language. I had volunteered at the Indiana School for the Deaf in my freshman year and saw how important a proper understanding was to the Deaf community. When I heard about this exclusion I was hurt and decided to help. First, I met with Dr. Michael O'hara, Associate Dean of the Fine Arts Department at BSU. He had previously directed CHILDREN OF A LESSER GOD and was a Deaf advocate. We discussed various ways to help the community, and his advice was to first ask what was needed before deciding to help.

The decision to showcase another performance art in my own art was particularly important to me as a culmination of my director training. We are constantly told that the mark of a great director is how much better the performers look to the audience than your entrance on opening night. Here this means that the real work has to do with others, not ourselves. The choice of Deaf performing artists was also particularly important to me, as my work as an artist, I feel, must be used to help members of the community heal or come together in some way. The only difference I hope to achieve between this project and my future ones is based on scale, not on theme.

I traveled to ISD and met with the superintendent to discuss what research was needed, he referred me to Debbie Fetzer. Debbie informed me that she had just made a

performing arts troupe at ISD called VIBRATIONS, which specialized in Deaf performing arts and its relation to music. She told me that the group wanted to travel across the country to perform and spread a message of awareness regarding the Deaf community and its love of music and ability to 'feel' what was happening physically with it. I agreed to help make a promotional video for the kids.

Particularly difficult with this project was the sheer volume of personnel management. I secured roughly 30 persons to help in various capacities throughout the project. Initially, I told them we were making a music video. After meeting with Debbie, I told them the project had changed. At this same time, we realized that we needed money to hire digital artists to help with the video project. I applied to the WIPB Grant Initiative in hopes to secure these funds. We were awarded \$8,000 dollars initially, which later changed to \$6,650, on the condition that we made a full half hour of programming with the funds. The needed time of footage was 26 minutes and 46 seconds. We agreed to make the documentary.

I then brought on Paul Symons as a Producer to aid in scheduling and writing for the documentary, but first we shot the promotional video. We had spent nearly two months interviewing the kids from Vibrations and learning about the Deaf ethos. Their primary message was that the Deaf could do anything that hearing persons might, except hear. This was of great importance to the kids even as we began documenting and began filming the promotional video. We filmed the promo in November as a sign of good faith so we could continue with the documentary. I came up with this idea from my research into anthropological filmmaking, where a small contingent of the documenting party arrives first, then follows through on small promises in order to gain trust, then brings the

remaining crew to finish the documentary. This is the technique we employed for this process.

The promotional video was shot in a single day and is featured in the documentary currently in small sections. For this first major production, we taught several members of the crew simple sign language. Some of these signs were for interactions with students, but another key component was that the music the kids danced to was so loud that we were not able to speak normally. We also discovered several other techniques that were helpful in both research and gathering styles. For instance, the children spoke much more and more emotionally when interviewed together and not separately. We learned this was in part because of how important togetherness was to the Deaf community. We also learned that our traditional approach of camera setups, such as tripods and shotgun microphones, were useless when the music was so loud it shook all our stands. We were forced to adapt our entire model of filming on day one. In addition to this pre-production, we planned extensively for a 12 hour shoot that November for the promo. We delivered the full promo to ISD the following January. During that interim we finalized the story development that was needed and organized the remaining months of shooting. This process took nearly two months of writing. We then presented our projected ideas to Debbie, who signed off on them so we could begin filming.

We then began filming the documentary from January to April, taking dozens of trips to ISD to gather information and film interviews/rehearsal footage. We spent Christmas break taking all our written information gathered and compiling it into a cohesive story for the documentary. One of our major expenditures in the project was to pay for Sean Forbes to come talk to the kids. Sean Forbes is a Deaf performing artist

from Michigan and co-founder of the Deaf performing arts network. Sean came to ISD and talked with the kids about their role in the Deaf community. He was a great support to their work and the kids really liked meeting him.

We began editing the project in March after several editing setbacks. We finally decided to hire an editor from Indianapolis called Forward Motion Media. Steven, our lead editor, loved the project and gave up several nights of sleep to see it out. We worked right up to the clock for our May 6th deadline, and finished the project strong. The piece is a fantastic example of the children's capabilities and the story involved.

This was a culmination of both my artistic development but also my development as a storyteller. I was grateful to those who helped and aided in the production of this documentary, and grateful for a team and family interested in me reaching my goals.